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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1176  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY 1103  
RHMFIASS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2014  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2276  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMFIASS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000325

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA, PRM/FO, AND PM/FO  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER  
TREASURY FOR U/S LEVEY  
DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/03/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PARM PINR PREF MASS SY IS LE  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: DRUSE AND PHALANGE DISMISSIVE OF ARAB  
LEAGUE INITIATIVE

REF: A. BEIRUT 296  
1B. BEIRUT 283

BEIRUT 00000325 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for Reasons: Section 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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1. (C) Advisors to Phalange party leader Amine Gemayel and Druse leader Walid Jumblatt were critical of Arab League SYG Amr Moussa's ongoing efforts to resolve Lebanon's political impasse, suggesting that Moussa's real focus was a successful Arab League summit. They said some in March 14 favor the Arab League initiative as a comprehensive three-point package and that electing a president without the other pieces in place could lead Lebanon into a Syrian trap resulting in even weaker state institutions. Both the March 14 majority and the opposition favor an electoral law based on the "qada" system, while acknowledging it would create both winners and losers within March 14. End summary.

2. (C) Pol/Econ Chief and Senior LES Political Advisor met Michel Mecattaf, Phalange regional officer director and advisor to former President Amine Gemayel, on February 26, and Wael Abu Four, Druse MP and advisor to Walid Jumblatt on February 28.

ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT

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3. (C) Abu Four said Arab League SYG Amr Moussa achieved nothing during his February 24-25 visit (Ref A) and was painting the Lebanese problem as an internal conflict to avoid tensions between Arab League member states in order to claim a diplomatic victory at the upcoming Arab League summit in Damascus. Therefore the March 14 bloc, he stressed, must work to avoid the perception that it is obstructing a solution.

4. (C) Abu Four claimed Parliament Speaker Berri was acting under Syrian instructions more than Hizballah's, especially with respect to his insistence on a blocking third in the cabinet. Relations between Aoun and Berri are terrible, he

said, claiming Hizballah had provided Aoun with a complete package on Berri's corruption in the Council for the South in an attempt to discredit the Speaker. Noting that Saad had called Berri following Amr Moussa's February 24-25 visit, Abu Four said Berri refused to receive March 14 representatives to further discuss the impasse.

¶ 15. (C) Mecattaf was equally dismissive of Moussa's efforts. Arab leaders should boycott the Damascus summit, Mecattaf said, disclosing that Saudi Ambassador to Lebanon Abed al-Aziz Khoja had informed him that Saudi Arabia will not send a representative to the summit unless Lebanon is represented with a president. Mecattaf also said Kuwait will attend the summit, but at a low level.

¶ 16. (C) Abu Four agreed that the Saudi position was good, but noted that the Egyptian position was still unclear. He claimed, however, that President Mubarak told Syrian Foreign Minister Moallem, when the latter delivered Egypt's invitation to the summit, that, "I will work on fulfilling the invitation to the Arab League summit, but there are some issues that ought to be solved beforehand." The Saudis were making progress with the Jordanians, he added.

¶ 17. (SBU) Abu Four said March 14 will send parliamentary delegations to Yemen, Morocco, Algeria and the Gulf to explain March 14's position prior to the March 5-6 Arab League Foreign Ministers' meeting in Cairo.

#### SOME IN MARCH 14 FAVOR THREE-PART PACKAGE DEAL

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¶ 18. (C) According to Abu Four, some in March 14 support the Arab League initiative as a comprehensive three-point package (presidential election, cabinet formation, and electoral law). March 14 should not focus on the presidential election

BEIRUT 00000325 002.2 OF 002

alone, he said, but in combination with agreement on the other two points.

¶ 19. (C) Abu Four feared a Syrian "trap" whereby Damascus would allow the presidential election to occur (without agreement on the other two points) immediately prior to the summit to ensure high-level representation, but would then continue to obstruct cabinet formation and agreement on electoral reform. Michel Sleiman, as the consensus president, would not form a government without the opposition's consent, he said. The Christians would be happy at having a president, while the Sunnis would be unhappy without a prime minister, a scenario that Syrians would find easier to deal with than the reverse.

¶ 10. (C) Note: Walid Jumblatt had previously told Charge (Ref B) that March 14 needed to have ministers decided before the presidential election. Otherwise, Lebanon would face an even bleaker situation of a weak president, a caretaker government, and no army commander. Furthermore, Telecom Minister Marwan Hamadeh added during the same meeting, Army Chief of Staff General Shawki al-Masri, a Druse, would be acting commander, feeding criticism that the government led by PM Siniora, a Muslim, is taking on Christian roles. End note.

#### ELECTORAL LAW:

MARCH 14 DIVIDED OVER QADA

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¶ 11. (C) On the election law, Abu Four said the PSP supports the use of qada (small districts), but only after changes are made in districting. He noted that Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea favors very small districts, especially in the Chouf region, PSP leader Walid Jumblatt's home base, which could harm relations between the two parties. However, he called Geagea a "wise man," implying that Geagea would not risk endangering his relationship with Jumblatt. Mecattaf said that, with smaller districts, the majority would loose

some seats in some qada, but would gain in others, notably in the Metn and Kasrawan districts.

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